

[No Subject]

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TAKE:28

Hon. Bill Blair (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to have the opportunity to rise today as the Minister of Emergency Preparedness to speak to the importance and necessity of the motion before the House.

Let me also acknowledge that the fact that we are all in this House as elected representatives from across Canada who have come to debate this important measure. It is evidence of the strength and resiliency of our democratic institutions. Although the subject of today's debate is a solemn one, I think it is also evidence that should give us strength, resolve and hope.

Let me begin my remarks by acknowledging the impact that these blockades and demonstrations have had on Canadian citizens, particularly for the people of Ottawa, who have been subject to intimidation and threats. The disruption of the course of their lives is, frankly, unacceptable.

Among the most important freedoms that we covet and protect in this country is the freedom of opinion, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, lawful peaceful protest. It has also been said that one's freedom to swing their fist ends at the end of my nose. What we have seen, unfortunately, over the past three weeks is those rights have been exceeded and abused to the point that it has put Canadians in harm's way.

I also want to speak briefly about the impact of the blockades that were taking place at vital trade corridors in this country, our international borders. When the protesters decided to go to our borders, we need to recognize and acknowledge they were going for the throat, and they were going to cut off the supply of goods and services that our country relies on.

When they stopped parts from coming across that border at the Ambassador Bridge, they shuttered factories, they idled workers, they damaged the reputation of Canada as a safe and stable place to invest. They hurt Canadians. It was clearly their intent. It is clearly what they were doing and it had to stop.

We saw the same targeted approach to hurt Canadian interests, to harm their fellow citizens, in Coutts, Alberta, in South Surrey, British Columbia, in Emerson, at the Ambassador Bridge, and a number of other points. This was not by accident. They did not just wander into those spaces. They went for the throat of this country. They created an emergency, an emergency that we had to respond to.

For the first time, we have come to the difficult decision to invoke the authorities of the Emergencies Act. I want to assure this House from the very outset that our government recognizes the significance of this decision, and the heavy responsibility that would come with pursuing it, not just the responsibility of this government, but of this House.

We approached the process with caution and with care. It was essential that we explore all options available to us. We looked at everything very closely. We looked at our existing legislation. We looked at the regulations with the support of our Department of Justice officials to see what additional federal supports would be required. We examined existing municipal, provincial and federal authorities.

I think it is rather evident the threat of parking tickets did not deter those trucks in Ottawa. The threat of the enforcement of Ontario's Highway Traffic Act did not deter those commercial carriers from coming down our highways and using their vehicles, which are licensed under that legislation, to cause harm to Canadians. It has also become clear of the limitations of even the authorities enshrined within federal law and the Criminal Code that our law enforcement officials were struggling.

I will give two examples that I hope will be helpful to Parliament in consideration of the necessity for these measures. I will mention one of the challenges that our law enforcement officials had and those who

are tasked with gathering and analyzing financial intelligence through FINTRAC. Unfortunately, the funding associated to these actions, which in many cases have been clearly criminal and harmful to Canadians, was opaque. It became very clear when our officials came to us that they did not have the tools that they needed to provide the necessary and appropriate scrutiny of the source of that funding and they did not have the tools to bring the accountability and even the consequences that were required to do their jobs.

We listened to what they needed. Ontario, for example, declared an emergency and brought forward really important and useful regulations, but they could not do that because it was our responsibility. We considered that and we listened.

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Another example that may sound trivial, but was significant, relates to jurisdictions right across the country. I heard from my counterpart and colleague, the minister responsible in Alberta, who, for weeks, has been asking for help to get tow trucks down to Coutts, Alberta to haul those trucks away, and yet the tow truck industry in Alberta, like in Ontario, like right across the country, as a result of threats and intimidation were afraid to do their jobs. We needed that equipment, we needed those drivers; we needed their ability to remove those vehicles, but they were intimidated and afraid, so we have brought forward in these measures the authority not to compel them, but to really authorize them to do what we all needed to be done.

I submit to all those here that these measures work. People, who knew about the gaps in our laws and law enforcement's response, were exploiting them. They went to school. We saw evidence of that in Coutts when we closed those gaps. I do not want to minimize the importance of the RCMP investigation. By the way, I am not going to comment on any of the aspects of their investigation or the prosecution that will follow. It is totally inappropriate for a minister to do so.

However, I want to thank them for doing their job. I want to thank God that they were able to do it safely. That eliminated part of the threat of Coutts, but when we announced on Monday that we were coming for the source of their funding and that there were going to be real consequences, financial consequences for their actions, they scurried away. That is exactly what we needed them to do. They did exactly the same thing in Emerson, Manitoba, even though we saw in Windsor that some of them were trying to go back because that is the way they can most effectively attack this country. They were stopped. They were stopped by effective law enforcement.

We have brought forward these measures, but let me also assure all my colleagues in this House that these measures must always be charter-compliant. Our expectation is that our law enforcement officials will do their job, the job we all need them to do, but they will always do it mindful of their responsibility to uphold the rule of law, to effect their lawful purpose with a minimum of force; to do the work right. I also want to assure this House that we will be there to support them. We will be there to support them. When they say they need tools, we will give them the tools to do the job. When they say they need resources, we will provide those resources to do the job.

Every order of government and every person in this House has a responsibility to stand up with resolve and determination and to do what is necessary to protect Canada's interests.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I note that the deputy director of intelligence for FINTRAC, Barry MacKillop would disagree with the minister's suggestion that there is extremist financing of the convoy, but I will move on to my question.

Back in January through March 2020, as the minister said, those people came for the throat. What happened to the throat of our country when our railways were being blockaded and when our pipelines were being blockaded? We could not even get propane to Quebec in the middle of the winter, risking the lives of so many seniors. The port of metro Vancouver was blockaded. The government said we need to initiate dialogue and we need to work with those people to come to a peaceful resolution.

What is the difference with the current situation that we are facing? Why is the Emergencies Act needed?

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, let me just speak to the member's first point because I have heard him ask the question before. Perhaps he has not been satisfied with the answer. I understand, because I also speak to FINTRAC often and I have worked with them for decades. They did not have the evidence because they did not have the tools to collect the evidence. We listened to them. They said they did not have the tools to examine cryptocurrency laws, for example. We told them we heard them. If they do not have the evidence, we will give them the tools to collect the evidence because it is necessary to protect Canadians.

The member's argument against these measures is clearly a little bit shallow. He needs to recognize that. He is right. We did not have that information and now we are getting that information. It is what our law enforcement officials need to protect the country.

M. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madame la Présidente, on convient que la situation est sérieuse. Le problème, c'est que pendant plus de deux semaines, seuls les partis d'opposition convenaient qu'il s'agissait d'une urgence.

Le premier ministre a capitulé quant à ses obligations d'utiliser les recours qui étaient à sa disposition précédemment. Les Québécois et les Canadiens méritent mieux.

J'aimerais savoir si l'honorable ministre est fier d'être assis aux côtés d'un premier ministre de dernier recours.

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TAKE:30

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, I want to assure the member that, not only am I proud, it is the honour of my life to be a member of this government serving Canadians. I also want to be very clear that we have been seized from the very first moment with supporting law enforcement efforts and also the efforts of our municipal and provincial partners. We have been working closely with provincial governments right across the country, including Quebec.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge that we very much respect the jurisdiction of provinces and territories that we are placing in their jurisdiction, as I am sure they recognize and respect our responsibility to maintain the integrity and security of our borders. All orders of government have a responsibility to protect Canadians, and we will all work together to do it.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I understand and share the concerns that people have about the potential long-term impacts of the use of emergency measures legislation, in particular, as it relates to the expansion of the institution of policing, given the past abuses and overreach against legitimate political actions by indigenous, racial and climate-justice activists and workers, and yet, with the capital and country in crisis, Canadians are feeling abandoned by their local police services who have repeatedly been caught on video compromised and at times seeming to be working in collusion with the insurrectionist occupation.

The last royal commission on policing was in 1962. Will the Minister of Public Safety commit to establishing a national commission on policing that would review the duties assigned to the police and their corresponding budgets, and will the minister commit to a secretariat or some other office to report on the radicalization and use of public resources and security forces for undemocratic ends?

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

One of the things that has become quite apparent, and I have concerns across the country as well, is an overwhelming desire that the police in this country do their job and that they do it right, that they do it in a way that is compliant with all of our laws, with our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that their response is measured, thoughtful, proportional and effective. We are working hard to make sure they have the tools and support they need.

I spent 40 years in policing, and policing must always be accountable to the people it serves, because the most important tool that the police have is the trust and confidence of the people they serve. We will always work to maintain that trust and confidence.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister of Emergency Preparedness for his comments this morning.

I appreciate the minister sharing the care and caution that this measure is being applied, and the Prime Minister shared a more targeted approach, but I need to reconcile that with what I am reading in the regulations that we have been provided, which mention critical infrastructure quite broadly. I share the concerns of the member for Burnaby South, for example, with respect to how this could be applied in the future to indigenous land defenders and climate activists.

Could the minister clarify the difference between the more targeted approach we are hearing and the words we are seeing written here?

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. I understand the concern, and I want to provide him with reassurance.

These measures are time-limited, they are subject to parliamentary and judicial scrutiny, and we will only use these measures as long as they are required. We recognize their extraordinary nature. They have to be subject to the scrutiny of this House; it is in the law. We will only use them as long as they are required, and we will always ensure that they are compliant with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.